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Multilingualism in the linguistic landscape of Eastern China: City residents' perceptions and attitudes

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Abstract: Linguistic landscape (LL) is a thriving strand of inquiry in sociolinguistics to interpret the multilingual representations in public space. Taking city residents as LL readers, this paper examines their opinions about the urban multilingualism visible in Eastern China's big cities in order to find out how the language displays are perceived and evaluated by the public. LL-related language policies and the LL practices in three representative cities are sketched out as the backdrop for the language attitude exploration. A questionnaire survey was administered among 1302 participants from Eastern China to investigate their perception of and attitudes towards the urban multilingualism in their lived space. It is found that most participants are aware of the multilingual practices in the written environment, and they respond positively to the Chinese-dominant, English-rich multilingual practices in the LL. The inscriptions of English and other foreign languages are generally conceived of as instrumental in the construction of an international-oriented city image. Moreover, the non-standard language variations (e.g. Chinglish) in the LL tend to be seen as a problem, though traditional Chinese characters are not turned down. The findings in the study can help us gain an understanding of the bottom-up language ideologies in China and contribute to the 'experiential' dimension of LL studies.

Keywords: Multilingualism, linguistic landscape, language attitudes, English, language ideology, China.

1. Introduction

In the past decade, the research on linguistic landscape (LL), namely the written language displayed in public space, has become a thriving strand of inquiry in sociolinguistics to scrutinize and interpret societal multilingualism in urban contexts. Taking LL as a symbolic construction of multilingual spaces (Ben-Rafael 2009) and "a major mechanism of language manipulation" (Shohamy 2006: 123), researchers examine the representations of various languages visible in material environments in order to "understand the motives, pressures, ideologies, reactions and decision making of people regarding the creation of public signage" (Shohamy 2012: 538) in the post-modern multilingual society. In light of its unique lens to the social fabric and dynamics of linguistic diversities, LL is applauded as a new approach to urban multilingualism (Gorter 2006), and a fine method to probe into a city's sociolinguistic ecology (Spolsky 2009). The descriptive, analytical and transdisciplinary potentials of LL study, according to Blommaert (2013: 3 [original italics]), make it an extremely useful toolkit for sociolinguistic researchers to attain "a diagnostic of social, cultural and political structures" of a multilingual area.

The visible multilingualism featured in LL has received much academic attention, and multifaceted dimensions of social, cultural and historical meanings associated with multilingual uses *in place* have been unveiled (see Gorter 2006; Backhaus 2007; Shohamy et al. 2010; Gorter et al. 2012; Hélot et al. 2012). However, previous investigations to the 'attitudinal' or 'experiential' dimension of LL (Trumper-Hecht 2010) are relatively scant. Garvin (2010), for example, conducted a walking-tour interview to examine the participants' self-reported understandings and visual perceptions of the public signage in Memphis, Tennessee. The interview responses demonstrate the psychological and emotional impact of LL on the identity and belongingness of the participants as immigrant residents. Aiestaran et al. (2010) carried out street interviews with passers-by in the central part of Donostia-San Sebastián city of Spain to find out their perceptions of languages on signs. Trumper-Hecht (2010) used a telephone questionnaire to examine the diverse perceptions, preferences and attitudes held by Arab and Jewish residents in a mixed city of Israel regarding the visibility of Hebrew and Arabic in the public space. In a recent study, Vessey and Sheyholislami

(2020) analysed internet users' attitudes towards the Chinese LL in Richmond, Canada to spell out the language ideological debate in the country. These attitudinal explorations to LL have enriched our understanding of the interactions between social actors and linguistic facts in the public space.

Situated in the urban context of Eastern China, this paper explores local inhabitants' attitudes towards urban multilingualism represented in the LL. I first provide a background to the LL-related language policies and the LL practices of large cities in the eastern region of mainland China (henceforth China). Then the results of an online questionnaire survey examining local city residents' opinions about LL are presented. Such a direct approach to bottom-up language attitudes towards LL can provide valuable insights into the language ideologies of the participants, and the local Chinese people in general, in an increasingly globalized and multilingual world. It also responds to the call for LL researchers to "situate and contextualize our studies in the lives of those who read, write and conduct their lives amongst the signs" in the urban space (Malinowski 2009: 124).

2. Multilingual landscape in Eastern China: management and practice

2.1. LL-related language regulations

As the chief social actor in language planning, Chinese government has made tremendous efforts to manage language issues that loom large in the society since the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 (e.g. Zhou 2004; Spolsky 2014; Li 2015). For instance, *Putonghua* (literally 'common speech') or Mandarin was enforced as the national "common language" and promulgated across the country, making it a superior Chinese variety in the multi-ethnic and multilingual society. In order to raise Chinese literacy of the population, the Chinese writing system was reformed, and simplified Chinese characters were promoted as the standard Chinese orthography in place of the traditional characters. Moreover, *Hanyu Pinyin* (henceforth Pinyin), namely the Romanization system for Chinese language, was developed to transcribe the pronunciation of Chinese characters. There are also other language planning initiatives undertaken in China, such as maintenance of minority varieties, diffusion of Chinese language worldwide, and reform of English language education, to name just a few (see Spolsky 2014). Such planning endeavours demonstrate the Chinese government's top-down governance of language matters as a means to modify the language practices and beliefs of Chinese people.

With regard to the LL in public space, numerous standards, decrees, guidelines or governmental notices have been mandated by the state and local governments to manage the language uses on signs. Among them, the *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language* (or the *Language Law* in short), coming into effect since January 2001, is the first national law on language uses approved by the state legislature to "promote the normalization and standardization of the standard spoken and written Chinese language" (Wang 2016). According to this law, simplified Chinese characters shall be used as the basic written form on the facilities in public places, signboards and advertisements (Article 14). In cases where bilingual signs have to be placed, standard simplified characters must be used, as stated in Article 13, "if public services require the use of both a foreign language and the Chinese language in signboards, advertisements, notices, signs, and so on, the Chinese language that is used shall be the standard Han characters" (Wang 2016). Traditional Chinese characters, on the other hand, are only allowed in limited situations, such as on cultural relics and at historical sites, in handwritten inscriptions or on handwritten signboards (Article 17). In addition, Pinyin is endorsed as the unified norm for transliterating place names (Article 18).

Apart from the *Language Law*, many other official documents pertinent to language displays have been published by national institutions as *ad hoc* policies regulating specific signs, including place name signs, advertisements, public service signs and so forth. Documents entitled *Geographical Names-Signs* (GB17733-2008), *Interim Provision on Governing the Usage of Spoken and Written Languages in Advertisement* (State Council Decree 84 1998) and the *Guidelines for the Use of English in Public Service Areas* (GB/T 30240-2013) are some typical examples of language standards or

regulations in this regard. In these documents, the legal status of *Putonghua*, simplified scripts and Pinyin in the public domain is reinforced, contributing to a culture of standardization in the country. In addition, such documents stipulate, among other things, that English-only texts and code mixing on signs are prohibited; when foreign languages are used, Chinese must be presented as the prioritized code.

Apart from the national language management measures, there are also regional standards or regulations issued by provincial or municipal governments to provide more practical solutions to the language issues in local contexts. It is in these documents that local language policies are formulated. The local versions of standards or regulations are generally in pursuance to the national language policies. However, there are occasionally incoherent or contradictory provisions. For instance, some capital cities or municipalities stipulate in their standards that English shall be inscribed on street name signs, which contradicts the national standard of inscribing Pinyin for Romanized place names (see Shang 2020).

2.2. LL practice in China's Eastern cities

In this part, the LL features of three typical and geographically proximate cities in Eastern China (Shanghai, Hangzhou and Ningbo) are sketched out to provide a general picture of the LL practices in Eastern China's typical cities. Located in the Changjiang River Delta area, one of the most open and economically affluent regions in China, these cities are modern, international-oriented metropolises. Apart from accommodating a large size of local population (25 million in Shanghai, 10 million in Hangzhou and 6 million in Ningbo), these cities also attract millions of tourists from abroad every year. In the urban space, different languages and varieties deployed in the LL demonstrate the interplay of various social, political, economic and cultural factors in the cities. The following generalizations are based on observations during my walking tours of the core district streets of the three cities in the years 2016 and 2017.

First, since Chinese is the common language of the country, Chinese language occupies the primary and salient positions on most signage in the LL. Monolingual and multilingual signs without using Chinese are very rare. Simplified Chinese characters as standard Chinese orthography are predominantly presented on public and private signs. In contrast, traditional characters are much fewer in quantity and mainly seen in historical streets, tourist destinations or building names. On commercial signs, traditional scripts account for a very small proportion. Second, though Pinyin is the national standard for the Romanized form of street names, Shanghai and Hangzhou display English instead of Pinyin on street name signs, while Ningbo follows the national standard and inscribes Pinyin. The wrestling between Pinyin and English on street name signs is a long-standing debate in China (see Shang 2020). Moreover, there are also Chinese shop names transliterated into Pinyin on commercial signs. Third, English is widely used on official and commercial signs due to its wide accessibility and abundant symbolic meanings. For instance, on public facilities such as public toilets, dustbins and parking, Chinese-English inscriptions are the standardized form on signs. In view of the policy documents mandating English inscriptions on public signs and the prevalent English signs in practice, Chinese-English bilingual signs¹ are becoming the *de facto* standard in the LL. On commercial signs, vogue display of English is prevalent in city space. In high-end commercial streets or shopping malls, stores without English inscriptions are less common. Many shops display English-only signs, a practice at odds with the official regulations on advertisement language uses. Moreover, Chinglish, a mixture of English and Chinese (Henry 2010; Radtke & Yuan 2011), is occasionally spotted on public or commercial signs (such as 'Slip carefully' to mean 'Caution, wet floor'). Fourth, other foreign languages are occasionally seen on public and commercial signs as well. In scenic spots, for example, there are sizable multilingual signs with Korean and Japanese in addition

¹ In this paper, bilingual signs are also seen as a type of multilingualism.

to Chinese and English to illustrate the attractions, give directional guidance or heed warnings. On commercial streets, shop names written in Korean, Japanese, French, German, Vietnamese or Thai are sometimes inscribed together with Chinese.

Taken together, the diversified language choices render the LL in Eastern China's cosmopolitan cities a site of visual multilingualism. However, how the multilingual practices are perceived or evaluated by the general public is yet to be known. To fill the research gap, I carried out an in-depth investigation of local residents' language attitudes towards the LL practices in these cities. The research question to be addressed is as follows: *How do the city residents perceive and evaluate the LL practices in the public space of their cities?* Addressing this question can help us better understand the language ideologies that prevail in the most open and developed cities in China and shed light on local residents' lived experiences of the multilingual landscape in the era of globalization.

3. The current study

3.1. Research instrument

In order to elicit city residents' opinions about the multilingual practices in Eastern China's public space, an online questionnaire survey was developed as research instrument. A list of multiple-choice questions was formulated in Chinese concerning the uses of various languages/scripts on public and commercial signs. In the instructions of the survey, the purpose of the research was clearly stated, and the participants were required to answer the questions based on their personal experiences of and attitudes towards the LL in their cities. The survey was anonymous, and the participants were informed that all information obtained from the survey was used for research purpose only. The questions in the survey can be categorized into five dimensions, namely the awareness of urban multilingualism, purpose of urban multilingualism, necessity of multilingual landscaping, attitudes towards the English uses on signs, and attitudes towards language variations. The survey was posted on wenjuanxing, a renowned online survey platform in China, for participants to answer. For the convenience of discussion, an English translated version is provided in this paper (see the appendix).

3.2. Research participants

Due to time and financial restrictions, we only sampled a small number of residents living or working in Eastern China's major cities to participate in the research. Since the survey contains some questions about the uses of English on signage, a certain level of English competency is expected for the respondents. From December 2016 to December 2017, we distributed the survey form mainly via Wechat, a widely used social media app in China. The participants were randomly selected based on the research team's personal connections. In addition, the wenjuanxing service team also helped sampling participants in their large pool of active users².

In the end, altogether, 1302 valid survey forms were collected in Eastern China's major cities. Among them, participants aged between 19 and 40 comprise the majority, accounting for over 77% (N=1005). Male and female participants account for 40% (N=522) and 60% (N=780), respectively, and the average time for survey completion was approximately 7 minutes. Most participants (89.2%, N=1161) have 6 to 10 years or an even longer period of English learning experience. In terms of occupations, nearly half of the respondents (49.8%, N=648) are college students studying at the tertiary institutions in Eastern China, and the rest (50.2%, N=654) are working professionals in a wide range of occupations such as teachers, researchers, civil servants, lawyers, journalists, and sales. Admittedly, the participants are far from representing the whole community of city residents. However, as educated and professional individuals, their subjective opinions about the urban LL can project the attitudes of the core social groups residing in Eastern China. In the ensuing analysis, the

² According to the official website of wenjuanxing www.wjx.com, there are about 1 million active users who create or answer surveys every day. The participants can be randomly sampled based on the criteria set by the survey makers.

participants are broadly categorized into two focal groups, i.e. students and working professionals, and their responses to the survey questions are presented in detail.

4. Results and findings

In this part, the participants' general perceptions of and attitudes towards the LL in Eastern China's urban space are analysed according to the five thematic dimensions of the survey. Since the code choices on street names have been analysed in Shang (2020), the results to be presented here do not include responses concerning road/street name signs.

4.1. Awareness of and reactions to urban multilingualism

I first examine to what extent the participants are aware of the multilingualism in the LL (Q1-Q4). Statistics shows that the vast majority of the students (81.2%, N=526) and working professionals (87%, N=569) often or occasionally attend to the Romanized scripts (i.e. English or Pinyin) on public signs, in comparison to 18.8% of the students (N=122) and 13% of the working professionals (N=85) who rarely take notice of such forms on signs. For the language forms on commercial signs, nearly equal proportions of students (83.6%, N=542) and working professionals (83.8%, N=547) pay attention to English or Pinyin on a frequent or occasional basis, while others rarely attend to such forms in the urban settings. As for tourist destinations, even more participants (students: 86.3%, N=559; working professionals: 86.7%, N=567) have showed conscious awareness of the multilingual representations on signs. Moreover, the traditional Chinese characters displayed in urban space are often or occasionally noted by nearly 80% of the students (N=515) and 77.7% of the working professionals (N=508). These results demonstrate that most participants have noted the urban multilingualism in their cities. The aggregate percentage of conscious awareness among the working professionals is slightly higher than the student group (83.8% vs. 82.6%), and the Mann-Whitney U test shows that the two groups have a statistically significant difference in the awareness of Romanized scripts in the LL (Q1, Q2 and Q3) at the confidence level of 95% (Table 1). These results suggest that the working professionals are more sensitive to the multilingual displays in urban space.

Table 1: Independent sample test statistics^a

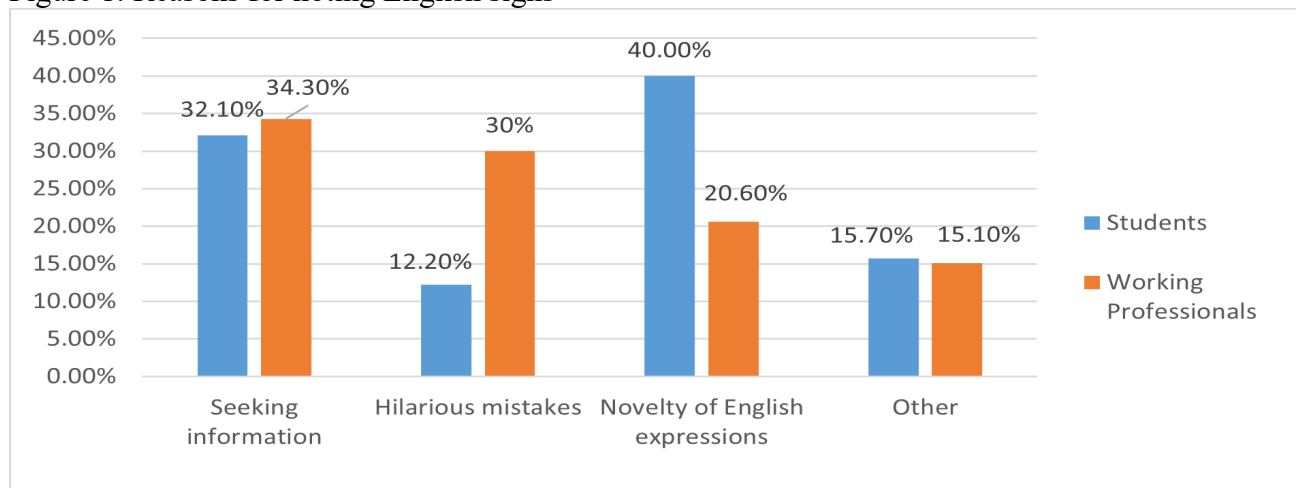
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Mann-Whitney U	178050.000	193831.500	190559.000	203500.000
Wilcoxon W	388326.000	404107.500	404744.000	413776.000
Z	-5.579	-2.985	-3.459	-1.376
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.003	.001	.169

a. Grouping Variable: Occupation

Regarding the English language on public or private signs (Q5), about 41% of the students (N=265) and 33.8% of the working people (N=221) often read the printed English texts, whereas 31.3% of the students (N=203) and about 42% of the working professionals (N=275) often check the accuracy of the English forms. Other participants, relatively fewer in number (students: 27.8 %, N=180; working professionals: 24.2%, N=158), usually ignore the English texts and read only the Chinese message. Though the reactions vary widely, the result suggests that the majority of the participants tend to engage themselves with the displayed English in one way or another. In fact, the participants take heed of English in the LL for various reasons (Q6). As shown in Figure 1, the novelty of English forms and the need for information are two major factors cited by students (72.1%,

N=468), while the information need and the hilarious English mistakes are two aspects most likely to attract working people (64.3%, N=420). The Mann-Whitney U test indicates that the inter-group difference for this question is statistically significant ($p=0.002$, $\alpha=0.05$), showing that the two groups have different interests with regard to English signs. English in the LL can be consumed actively or passively, serving as a means for advertising creativity, cues of information or merely a source of amusement. While students tend to take English signs as a site of creative ideas, a large proportion of the working people often attend to faulty English in the public space mainly for fun.

Figure 1: Reasons for noting English signs



Regarding the uses of other foreign languages (e.g. Japanese, Korean, French) on commercial signs (Q7), 43.2% of the students (N=280) and 43.6% of the working professionals (N=285) claim that they read the languages or use the scripts as a medium to elicit useful information about the business. Moreover, 36.4% of the students (N=236) and 24.9% of the working professionals (N=163) indicate that store owners need such languages/scripts for marketing purposes. The rest of the participants (students: 20.4%, N=132; working professionals: 31.5%, N=206) think otherwise, contending that these foreign languages are of little use for them, and they read only Chinese in such situations. The figures suggest that most respondents tend to believe that the non-English foreign languages in the LL are useful either for the business owners or for themselves as customers. Albeit largely intelligible to local people, such foreign languages are symbolic of exotic culture and identity, thus going a long way to manoeuvre the clientele's consumption. Though the participants' opinions on this matter are diversified, no significant inter-group difference is found ($p=0.067$, $\alpha=0.05$).

4.2. Purposes of urban multilingualism

Indubitably, urban multilingualism is purposefully played out by LL authors such as governmental agencies, enterprises or individuals. The participants are inquired to speculate the possible reasons or purposes of presenting various languages/scripts in the LL. Though the respondents are not sign authors, their viewpoints can reveal sign readers' perspectives to the motivations or rationale for multilingual representations in urban settings.

For the Romanized scripts printed on public service signs (Q8), nearly 94% of the students (N=605) and 86.1% of the working professionals (N=563) believe that they are meant to bring convenience to foreigners or exhibit the city's internationalization-oriented image, showing that the informational and symbolic functions of English/Pinyin in the official LL are generally appreciated by the participants. Those respondents voting for language strategy or other purposes are much fewer (10.3%, N=134). As for the purpose of presenting English on commercial signs (Q9), the two groups express statistically different viewpoints ($p<0.001$, $\alpha=0.05$). The majority of the students (75.5%,

N=489) contend that English signs are intended to convey symbolic meanings such as international orientation, fashion, taste and sophistication of the commodities and/or service. Other students hold that English is inscribed on commercial signs either for economic ends, i.e. to attract customers of various language backgrounds (18.2%, N=118), or merely for aesthetics of decoration (6.3%, N=45). For the working professionals, in contrast, the purposes in descending order are the economic ends (42.2%, N=276), international orientation (34.9%, N=228), fashion, taste or reliability (19.9%, N=130) and decoration (3.1%, N=20). The contrast suggests that the students advocate the symbolic representations of English in the marketplace, whereas the working people underscore the instrumental values of English on commercial signs.

When it comes to English on tourist signs (Q10), the majority of the participants (students: 78.7%, N=510; working professionals: 76.3%, N=499) agree that English is mainly presented for communicative purpose, as the English translations can help international tourists better understand the meanings and functions of the signs inside the tourist attractions. A small portion of participants (students: 14.7%, N=95; working professionals: 16.8%, N=110) subscribe to the branding functions of such English signs. After all, internationalization is a sought-after branding goal for most Chinese megacities, and a tourist-friendly environment is believed to be able to facilitate the city's image construction. The rest (3.2%, N=23) voted for other purposes.

With regard to the display of Korean or Japanese languages on signs (Q11), the majority (students: 60%, N=385; working professionals: 77.8%, N=509) contend that the increasing influx of East Asian tourists to China is an impetus for inscribing Korean/Japanese on public signs. Obviously, the informational functions of such signs can bring convenience for tourists from the two countries. Other respondents attribute the Korean/Japanese display to the rising impact of Korean and Japanese economics and culture (students: 17.9%, N=116; working professionals: 11.9%, N=78), close bilateral relationship between the city and Japan/Korea (students: 17.1%, N=111; working professionals: 7.5%, N=49), or other reasons (4.1% of the total, N=54).

When it comes to traditional Chinese characters on shop signs (Q12), the participants' views are diversified with significant difference between the two groups ($p=0.000014$, $\alpha=0.05$). Among them, 42.1% of the students (N=273) and 48.5% of the working people (N=317) think that such scripts can represent tradition or authenticity of the brands or commodities. Indeed, Chinese shop owners often resort to traditional scripts' indexicality of authentic Chinese culture in the marketing (Shang & Guo 2017). Nearly one fourth of the respondents (students: 24.2%, N=171; working professionals: 24.5%, N=160) believe that in the LL where simplified Chinese is predominant, traditional characters can make the signs stand out from others, a reflection of the "presentation of self" structuration principle of LL (Ben-Rafael 2009). Moreover, some participants subscribe to the aesthetic effect of traditional scripts vis-à-vis simplified characters (students: 15.3%, N=99; working professionals: 20.3%, N=133), or other reasons (students: 18.4% N=119; working professionals: 6.7%, N=44). For instance, traditional characters may mark off the origin of the marketing brands where traditional Chinese characters are the officially endorsed Chinese orthography (e.g. Hong Kong or Taiwan). In general, the results suggest that the participants recognize the multiple functions of traditional Chinese characters in the LL.

4.3. Necessity of urban multilingualism

When asked about the necessity to set up more English signs in city space (Q13), the majority of the participants (students: 69.8%, N=452; working professionals: 62.2%, N=407) respond affirmatively, contending that more English signs symbolize a more internationalized city image. Those clearly opposing to placing more English signs are much fewer (9.1%, N=118). This contrast shows that English signs in the LL are generally welcomed by the city dwellers. About 20% of the students (N=129) and 24.2% of the working group (N=158) hold that it should be determined by the volume of international tourists. They seem to prioritize the real communicative needs of the English language

rather than the sheer quantity of English signs. The rest (2.9%, N=38) take no sides.

As for the inscription of English on traffic signs (Q14), the vast majority (students: 87.7%, N=568; working professionals: 77.8%, N=509) believe it is necessary, as it can bring convenience for the drivers lacking in Chinese literacy, and the semiotic needs of domestic and foreign drivers can thus be accommodated. A small portion of the participants (students: 5.6%, N=36; working professionals: 9.9%, N=95) take a contrary opinion on the ground that too much information on traffic signs may cause confusion for ordinary drivers. The rest (7.2%, N=94) stay neutral on the matter.

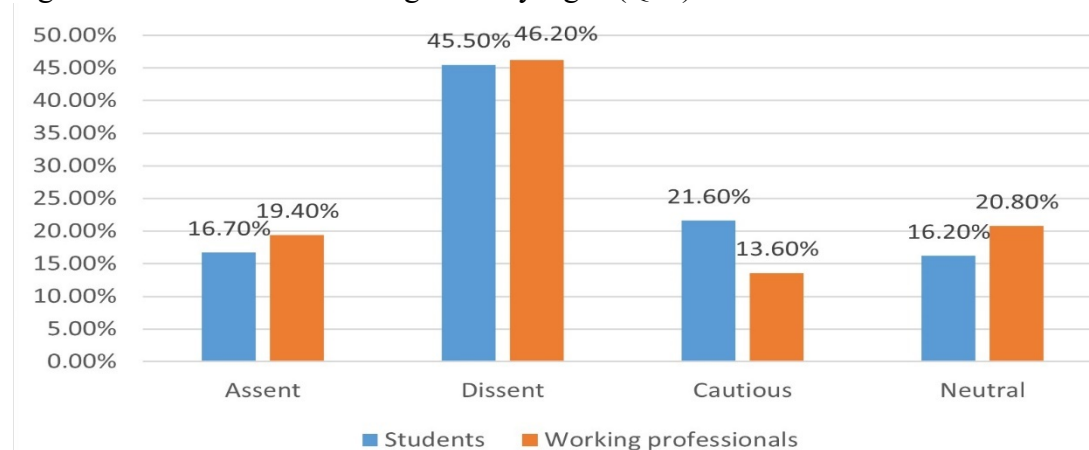
There are minority group enclaves in many cities where Han people are the predominant community. As for the inscription of minority languages in such enclaves (Q15), most respondents (students: 86.4%, N=560; working professionals: 72.6%, N=475) think it necessary as it is conducive to the preservation of minority languages and culture. In contrast, about 9% of the students (N=58) and 16.7% of the working people (N=109) hold that minority groups should learn and use the national common language (i.e. Mandarin Chinese), and it is not worthwhile to display minority languages. The different percentages between the two groups suggest that the students are more enthusiastic in the protection of minority languages through LL, while the working people tend to advocate an assimilationist approach to minority languages. The rest (7.7%, N=100) take a neutral stance.

4.4 Attitudes towards English uses on signs

This section presents the participants' attitudes towards the uses of English in the LL. In response to the increasing English signs in commercial districts (Q16), the vast majority (students: 89.3%, N=579; working professionals: 87.8%, N=574) take it as a natural phenomenon. In their opinion, English signs are used to meet the needs of consumers pursuing international brands, and the profusion of English is a typical feature of cosmopolitan cities worldwide. The rest (students: 10.7%, N=69; working professionals: 12.2%, N=80) argue against it, claiming that Chinese language should be prioritized in the LL, and vogue display of English is a symptom of blind faith in foreign products.

With regard to the display of English-only shop names (Q17 and Q18), the Mann-Whitney U test results show that the students and working people hold significantly different viewpoints ($p < 0.001$ and $p = 0.023$, respectively, $\alpha = 0.05$). The working professionals having negative perceptions of English monolingual signs (50.6%, N=331) outnumber those of the student group (37.8%, N=245). In their opinion, presenting English-only shop names is nothing more than a marketing gimmick. In contrast, others mainly take such English signs as expressions of symbolic meanings such as internationalization taste, high-end brand or reliable quality (students: 62.2%, N=403; working professionals: 49.4%, N=323). These figures seem to show that English-only signs appeal to students more than the working people. When evaluating the placement of English-only signs, as shown in Figure 2, the majority (students: 45.5%, N=295; working professionals: 46.2%, N=302) show dissent in that English-only shop names are unfavourable for the businesses. In contrast, those who advocate English-only signs for their direct branding strategy are relatively fewer in number (students: 16.7%, N=108; working people: 19.4%, N=127). Moreover, it can be seen that more working professionals than students take a neutral stance concerning this issue, holding that shop owners have freedom to choose any languages to display on signs, whereas students take a more cautious attitude than the working group, arguing that English-only signs have pros and cons in the marketplace.

Figure 2: Attitudes towards English-only signs (Q17)



In different cities, the density of English signs in the urban environments may vary to some extent. In response to such differences (Q19), the majority (students: 64%, N=415; working professionals: 67%, N=438) think that it is caused by the different internationalization levels of the cities. That is, high internationalization engenders a high density of English signs, or vice versa. Others attribute such differences to the macro policy for urban planning (students: 17.4%, N=113; working professionals: 19.9%, N=130), the economic vibrancy of the cities (students: 15%, N=96; working professionals: 10.9%, N=71), or other reasons.

The LL forms a multilingual repertoire available to all readers. For the possibility to take LL as a resource for language teaching and learning (Q20), most of the participants (students: 73.6%; N=477; working professionals: 77.7%, N=508) give a positive response. This resonates with English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' attitudes towards the pedagogical values of English in cities of China (Shang & Xie 2020). Nevertheless, more students take a cautious attitude than the working group (22.8% (N=148) vs. 10.1% (N=66)) on the ground that the poor quality of English on signs may not be favourable for English teaching/learning. The rest (students: 3.5%, N=23; working professionals: 12.2%, N=80) deem English in the LL to be of little pedagogical value.

4.5 Attitudes towards language variations on signs

Lastly, participants' attitudes towards the language uses deviant from official standards are investigated. Public signs sometimes present English translations that are deviant from Standard English. Known as Chinglish, such English forms displayed on signs are often backlashed in the media (Shang & Xie 2020). With regard to Chinglish on signs (Q21), most participants (students: 72.4%, N=489; working professionals: 77.7%, N=508) hold that it will tarnish the images of the city, thus it must be eradicated. To do that, English native speakers need to be consulted in order to provide more accurate translations. In contrast, a small proportion of participants (students: 22.7%, N=147; working professionals: 16.1%, N=105) accord values to Chinglish, believing that it deserves to be explored further. The rest (5.7% of the total, N=74) contend that Chinglish is forgivable in China's EFL context.

Regarding the officially mandated guidelines for English translation on signs (Q22), the vast majority (students: 93.4%, N=605; working professionals: 84.4%, N=552) deem them necessary and worthwhile, believing that the quality of displayed English can be warranted. Other respondents (students: 6.6%, N=45; working professionals: 15.6%, N=102) take a contrary attitude, arguing that they do not raise local people's English proficiency. Nevertheless, they tend to be optimistic regarding the long-run effect of such measures.

As for the lettered words (such as SPA, KTV, 2F, P) on signs (Q23), the vast majority of the

participants (students: 92.1%, N=597; working professionals: 88.1%, N=576) hold that such words should be accommodated, as they are an integral part of the Chinese language system and can express meanings concisely and effectively. Only about 10% of the respondents (N=129) contend that such expressions may ruin the purity of languages or impose barriers to people with low English competency and, thus, should be avoided.

Some stores use Pinyin (rather than English) on shopfront signs to transliterate the Chinese shop names (e.g. *Yi Pin Tang Xiao Chi Dian* instead of *Yipintang Restaurant*). For such an inscribing practice (Q24), the participants' attitudes vary widely with a significant inter-group difference ($p < 0.01$, $\alpha = 0.05$). Over half of the respondents (students: 56.6%, N=367; working professionals: 51.4%, N=336) deem it acceptable as it can provide convenience for non-Chinese readers, and some even wish to see more Pinyin signs. In contrast, 31.5% of the students (N=204) and 35.9% of the working people (N=235) contend that Pinyin shop names are meaningless for the targeted audience; instead, English translations would be more apt. The rest (students: 12%, N=77; working professionals: 12.7%, N=83) are more flexible for the shop name coding, noting that both Pinyin and English are acceptable on shop signs. Generally, the students seem to be more tolerant of the Pinyin transliteration of shop names.

For the traditional Chinese characters on private signs (Q25), most respondents (students: 62.4%, N=404; working professionals: 64.3%, N=421) take them as an essential element of Chinese language, thus no intervention is needed. In contrast, 21.8% (N=141) and 16.2% (N=106) of the working group hold that since the orthographic standard is instituted, it must be strictly followed in practice. As fervent standard defenders, they insist that the traditional scripts on signs shall be replaced by simplified characters. The rest (students: 15.9%, N=103; working professionals: 19.4%, N=127) take a middle course, claiming that strict measures for orthographic standards can be imposed on new signs rather than the signs already in place.

5. Discussion

5.1 Urban multilingualism embraced

Taking city residents as sign readers, this study has used a survey to examine their attitudes towards the multilingual LL in big cities of Eastern China, showing that urban multilingualism is generally embraced by the participants in the current era of economic globalization and internationalization. In China's language regime, Mandarin Chinese plays an overarching role in the state's language practices, and the top-down language planning and policies warrant the predominance of simplified Chinese in the LL. Moreover, English, as a world language and global lingua franca (Crystal 1997), is gaining widespread currency in Chinese society due to its enormous cultural and symbolic capital (Cortazzi & Jin 1996; Pan 2015). The dynamics of urban multilingualism in Eastern China is substantially attributed to the influx of English into the otherwise Chinese-dominant society at large. The survey results show that most respondents have noticed the urban multilingualism in the physical environments and act in some way to tap into the social-cultural meanings associated with the various codes in their daily encounters. The working professionals are generally more sensitive to the multilingual LL in the cities than the students, and the two groups show slightly different interests when engaging with the LL. As for the public signs with English or other foreign languages, the participants seem to appreciate the official language ideologies to engage more with the international world through the construction of foreigners-friendly language environments. In their opinion, increasing presence of non-Chinese languages in the LL is indexical of the economic vibrancy and degree of internationalization of the cities, a situation in consonance with the national and regional development agenda. These findings make it clear that the city residents valorise the multilingual representations in the LL, taking urban multilingualism as a necessary landscaping mechanism and a natural outcome of population mobility, economic liberty and/or cultural integration. In this sense, the "discourse of profit" outweighs the "discourse of right" (Heller 2011) in the perspective of the

participating city residents. Provided the dominant role of standard Chinese is not challenged, the non-Chinese languages/scripts in the LL are welcomed to fulfil informational and symbolic functions to the readers at large.

5.2 *Rationalist attitude toward urban multilingualism*

People's language attitudes towards LL are closely related to their conceptualization of the functions of various languages. In his account of language variation and language standardization, Geeraerts (2003) proposed two cultural cognitive models underpinning people's conceptualization of sociolinguistic realities: the rationalist model which originated in the Enlightenment thinking, and the romantic model which mainly emerged as a countering dialectic of the Enlightenment. According to Geeraerts (2003), the rationalist model takes language as a medium of communication, and language standardization as a means of attaining social participation and emancipation; the romantic model, in contrast, posits language as an expression of individual identity, and language standardization as a tool of discrimination and exclusion. Albeit the partial convergence in the nationalist and postmodern transformations over the last centuries, the tensions between the two competing models have never been defused. The cultural models can be applied to interpret people's attitudes towards various languages in the LL.

The participants' attitudes towards urban multilingualism in this study are largely situated within a rationalist frame, as they view language forms as a medium of communication for various purposes. While the national language policies clearly promulgate standard Chinese, the regional policies have created conditions for capitalizing on multiple languages in city life. According to the rationalist approach, an English-rich multilingual environment is instrumental and can bring more opportunities for the cities to engage in the globalization process. English in the LL can provide more accessible information to international tourists, thus facilitating the communication between the sign authors and the non-Chinese readers from abroad. Other foreign languages, all having their functional domains in urban language life, are also useful communicative tools conducive to the social participation and population mobility. These viewpoints resonate with the mechanisms of linguistic instrumentalism (Wee 2003) or commodification of languages (Heller 2010), namely perceiving various languages as commodifiable resources to exchange for economic or other profits. In contrast, the romantic perspective, positing the spread of English as a threat to the nation, is not remarkably manifested in our survey. The urban multilingualism is seldom challenged by the surveyed participants, and the potential risks of cultural hegemony and language homogeneity caused by the spread of English (Phillipson 1992) have not raised much alarm. However, the romantic model of multilingualism is not totally irrelevant. It is found that the participants largely subscribe to the uses of traditional characters and minority languages for their markings of cultural identities, showing that the values of the peripheral languages are appreciated by the local residents. In comparison to the working professionals, there are more student proponents for the values of language forms deviated from the stated standards (e.g. Chinglish, traditional Chinese characters, English-only signs), suggesting that they are more inclined to be romantic defenders of identity expressions.

5.3 *LL practice and city images*

Under the impetus of economic globalization and encouraged by China's economic reforms and opening-up policy, many Chinese cities set their goals to become a global or international city (Wu 2006; Zhou 2002). Terms like *modernization* and *internationalization* have been explicitly incorporated into the official discourse of city images (Berg & Björner 2014). For instance, English in public space is considered as an essential aspect of constructing international cities, as English is often regarded as a symbol of modernity, international orientation, sophistication and fashion (Piller 2003). In a bid to improve the city images, many large-scale bilingual infrastructural projects are launched, and campaigns to eradicate nonstandard language uses on signs are frequently carried out

in Chinese cities.

This study shows that the participants accord with the idea of constructing positive city images through the multilingualism in LL. The dominant political and media framings of internationalization and modernity as noble goals to attain for cities have clearly exerted an influence on city residents, who advocate an English-rich cityscape to symbolize an open, inclusive and diverse image of the cities. In light of the prevailing standard language ideology (Milroy 2001), Chinglish in the urban space is treated as a problem, as the language forms deviate from the recognized “authority of centre” (Blommaert 2010). For most participants, only Standard English in LL is considered congruent with the aspired city images, and those deviated English forms have to be eradicated. Chinglish is perceived as substandard English expressions which would tarnish the images of the cities and thwart the speakers’ intended identity of English-speaking elites in the society. As English is perceived as “a powerful index of identity” (Blommaert 2010: 130), the participants’ fetish for standard English also suggests that people with English competency wish to affirm their membership to an elite group of the cities characterized by “prestige multilingualism” (Vogl 2012). Especially for the working professionals, their tolerance of the deviated language forms is relatively lower than the students. It should be noted, however, that not all language variations are equally frowned upon. The traditional Chinese characters, for instance, as non-legitimate orthographic forms, are generally acceptable for the respondents due to their symbolic marking of Chinese cultural traditions. This position is understandable in that the variation is primarily relevant for Chinese readers and has little impact on the “face” of the city to the outside world. In this sense, the city images to be constructed through LL are mainly external-oriented.

6. Conclusion

The multilingual practices in the LL are subject to interpretations for the people living and acting within them. As Kelly-Holmes (2014) argues, the practice of visible multilingualism in urban contexts “enriches and potentially challenges the monolingual’s world”. This paper has offered an account of the bottom-up language attitudes towards the LL in Eastern China’s cities. Conceptualized as a social fact, the urban multilingualism in the LL has been investigated from the perspective of local city dwellers, thus revealing the ideological affordances of urban multilingualism in the “globalized localities” (Heller 2011). The results of the questionnaire survey show that the multilingual representations in the LL are generally accommodated and embraced by the participating residents. Most participants take a rationalist stance towards the LL, holding that various languages on signs serve as a medium of communication to meet the diversified semiotic needs of the readership home and abroad. The construction of a foreigners-friendly language environment is essentially welcomed by the participants. In addition, the traditional characters and minority languages are also viewed as valuable semiotic resources in the LL. The thrust of English in the LL is taken as a marker of modernity and internationalization of cities. Nevertheless, only Standard English is conceived of as compatible with the aspired city images, alluding to the powerful standard language ideology. Though the global spread of English may have repercussions for the language habitus of the general public, the multilingual representations in the LL are perceived more as an opportunity than as a threat for the metropolitan cities.

Finally, it should be noted that the language attitudes analysed in the survey are indicative of the viewpoints of two focal groups of the city residents. For most of the questions, the opinions expressed by the students and the working professionals are parallel, though subtle attitudinal differences do exist between the two groups. For example, the students are relatively more tolerant of the deviated language forms in the LL, while the working professionals are keener on regulating them. This contrast might suggest that the students, mostly young people, are more open to postmodern thinking such as linguistic diversity and individual freedom of choice, whereas the working professionals prefer more rigour in language standards, placing high value on the importance

of standardization. In the future, people from more diversified backgrounds (especially people with no English competency) need to be engaged, supplemented with in-depth interviews, in order to gain more extensive views about the urban multilingualism in the LL of China.

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Appendix

A Survey on Linguistic Landscape in Cities of China

This survey is aimed at understanding your perceptions and attitudes towards the language uses on signs in the cities where you are living or working. For each question, please choose ONE answer that best matches your opinion.

Gender: Male / Female

Age: 18 or below / 19-25 / 26-30 / 31-40 / 41-50 / 51 or above

Education: Pre-college / Undergraduate / Master or PhD

Experience of English learning: 3-5 years / 6-10 years / 11 years or more

Name of your city: _____

1. I _____ notice the Pinyin/English language on public signs (e.g. road signs, street names) in my city.

- A. rarely;
- B. occasionally;
- C. often.

2. I _____ notice the Pinyin/English language on commercial signs in my city.

- A. rarely;
- B. occasionally;
- C. often

3. I _____ notice the foreign languages displayed on signs in scenic spots in my city.

- A. often;
- B. occasionally;
- C. rarely.

4. I _____ notice the traditional Chinese characters on signs in my city.

- A. often;
- B. occasionally;
- C. rarely.

5. As for English displayed on public or commercial signs, I tend to _____

- A. read it to gain useful information;
- B. check whether the use of English is correct;
- C. ignore it and just read the Chinese message.

6. English signs in my city attracted my attention mainly because of _____

- A. the need for information;
- B. the hilarious English mistakes;
- C. the creativity of English expressions;
- D. other (e.g. the ubiquity of such signs).

7. As for other foreign languages (e.g. Japanese, Korean or French) displayed on shop signs, I tend to _____.

- A. read them to gain information;
- B. look at the scripts to elicit useful information;
- C. ignore them and just read Chinese;
- D. skip them with the feeling that they are necessary for the stores.

8. The main purpose of presenting Romanized scripts on public signs is ____.

- A. to bring convenience for foreigners.
- B. to exhibit an internationalized image of the city.
- C. to implement the language policy of the nation or the city.
- D. other.

9. The main purpose of presenting English on shop name signs is ____.

- A. to signify the symbolic values of fashion, sophistication or reliability;
- B. to attract customers of various language backgrounds;
- C. to signify the international taste of the product or service;
- D. for decoration.

10. The main purpose of presenting English on signs at tourist attractions is ____.

- A. to help international tourists to know more about the attractions;
- B. to show an image of the internationalization of the cities;
- C. to create an environment friendly to international tourists;
- D. other.

11. At tourist destinations, the main reason for presenting Japanese or Korean on signs is ____.

- A. the increase of Japanese and Korean tourists;
- B. the growing impact of Japanese and Korean economy and culture;
- C. the close relationship between the city and Japan/South Korea;
- D. other.

12. Traditional Chinese characters are used in some shop names. The main purpose is ____.

- A. to reflect tradition or authenticity of the business;
- B. the elegance of traditional characters in calligraphy work;
- C. a way of standing out from other signs;
- D. other.

13. Do you think it necessary to place more English signs in your city?

- A. Necessary, as it can create an image of internationalization;
- B. Not necessary, as English may challenge the dominance of Chinese language;
- C. It depends on the number of international tourists;
- D. It does not matter.

14. Do you think it necessary to use English on the traffic signs above the streets?

- A. Necessary, as it can bring convenience for non-Chinese drivers and tourists;
- B. Not necessary, since too many words on such signs can cause confusion for drivers;
- C. It does not matter as long as the Chinese information is clear;
- D. Not sure.

15. In the minority group enclaves in the city, is it necessary to present minority languages on signs?

- A. Necessary, as it facilitates the maintenance of the minority groups' languages and culture;
- B. Not necessary, as minority groups should learn to use Mandarin Chinese;
- C. It does not matter, as the maintenance of minority languages should not rely on public signs;
- D. Not necessary, as the majority population cannot read the minority languages.

16. How do you evaluate the numerous English signs on commercial streets in your city?

- A. Understandable, as English signs can meet the consumers' need for brand products;
- B. Chinese should be given priority on such signs;
- C. It is a sign of blind faith in foreign things;
- D. Not surprising, as the prevalence of English is common on commercial streets in the world.

17. Some stores display English-only shop names. How do you evaluate such a practice?

- A. They make the brands salient;

- B. Not all potential customers can understand such names;
- C. The business owners have the right to choose what languages to display;
- D. English-only signs have pros and cons.

18. What is your possible feeling concerning the sight of stores with English-only shop names?

- A. The goods have high-end brands;
- B. The quality of the goods is reliable;
- C. The goods are internationally oriented;
- D. Nothing but a marketing gimmick.

19. The proportion of English public signs varies in different cities mainly because of ____.

- A. the different levels of internationalization of the cities;
- B. the different vibrancy of economic development;
- C. the different urban planning policies;
- D. other.

20. Do you agree that English on signs can become a resource for English learning?

- A. Agree, and teachers should consider using them in the classroom;
- B. Disagree, as the pedagogical value of English is low;
- C. Agree, as it may help English learning in a subtle way;
- D. Not sure.

21. What actions should be taken concerning the signs with Chinglish?

- A. Regulate them as they stain the images of the city;
- B. Seek an English native speaker's opinions and provide more accurate translations;
- C. Study them as they indicate the Chinese way of thinking;
- D. No need to worry as English is just a foreign language.

22. The city authorities issued English translation guidelines to warrant the quality of English on signs. Do you think such measures are necessary?

- A. Very necessary;
- B. Necessary;
- C. Not of much use, as the English proficiency of the Chinese people has not essentially improved.
- D. They are 'face projects', but may be conducive to the elevation of the internationalization level of the city.

23. On the Chinese signs, lettered words such as SPA, KTV, P and 2F are sometimes used.

What do you think about the presence of such lettered words?

- A. They undermine the purity of Chinese language;
- B. They make concise expressions and should be accepted;
- C. They have become a part of Chinese language, thus should be accommodated.
- D. They should be avoided, as people with low English proficiency may not understand them.

24. Some stores put Pinyin on shopfront name signs (e.g. Yi Pin Tang Xiao Chi Dian rather than Yipintang Restaurant). What do you think about such a naming practice?

- A. Acceptable, as it can be useful for non-Chinese customers;
- B. I want to see more of such Chinese-style signs;
- C. Unacceptable, and English translation would be more meaningful;
- D. It does not matter whether you use Pinyin or English.

25. Do you think interventions should be taken towards the traditional Chinese characters used on building names, shop names or tourist spots?

- A. Yes, they should be fixed;
- B. No need, as traditional characters are also part of Chinese language;
- C. Not necessary to launch large-scale campaigns to fix the established signs with traditional characters;
- D. Strict measures should be targeted at new signs to be displayed rather than the signs in place.

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